

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH JACK HARRISON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU SUBJECT: INACCURATE REPORTING SURROUNDING RECENTLY ANNOUNCED DEPLOYMENT OF NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS TO SOUTHWEST BORDER TIME: 10:00 EDT DATE: FRIDAY, AUGUST 6, 2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg and I'll be moderating the event. I'd like to welcome you to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Friday, August 6th, 2010. As previously stated, my name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

A note to everyone on the line. Please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization you're with prior to asking your questions. And also, if possible, please place your phone on mute just in case we don't hear any background noise as you ask your question.

And today, our guest is Mr. Jack Harrison. He's the National Guard Bureau director of communications, and he'll be addressing inaccurate reporting surrounding the recently-announced deployment of up to 1,200 members of the National Guard to the Southwest border.

At this time, I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Harrison. He'll begin with an opening statement and will go into questions. Sir, the floor is yours if you'd like to begin.

MR. HARRISON: Thank you very much. Good morning, everyone. I'm very pleased to be with you this morning. I will be honest with you and tell you this is my virgin voyage for a Bloggers Roundtable, but I'm very excited to talk with you today about the National Guard's role on the Southwest border -- more specifically, to the point that Lt. Cragg intimated just a moment ago.

The National Guard is pleased to be supporting our interagency partners at DHS, at the Department of Homeland Security. The Customs and Border Protection folks and the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement folks have asked for our support and we are pleased to be providing that support.

We have a long history, almost 20 years or more, of supporting CBP on the Southwest border, and we look forward to supporting this mission request.

With that, I'll take your questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

Edwin was on the line first, so Edwin, please go ahead with your questions.

Q Can you -- this is Edwin Mora from CNSnews.com. Can you describe the mission for the National Guardsmen along the Southwest border? And can you say whether the National Guard has conducted any kind of assessment to determine if 1,200 troops is an adequate number to accomplish that mission?

MR. HARRISON: I'll answer your second question first, Edwin. DHS and DOD determined the number necessary for this request, and I don't have anything further on that part of your question.

With respect to describing the mission, in a nutshell, it's a -- it's a twofold support mission, in criminal analysis and entry identification teams on the Southwest border.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Edwin.

Michel (sp), you were second. Please go ahead.

Q Good morning, Mr. Harrison.

MR. HARRISON: Good morning.

Q So, U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords has been voicing some criticism about the deployment, asking whether or not the 1,200 have already been deployed to the border, whether or not we're going to get the -- and I'm here in Arizona, so we have 524 -- whether or not those 524 are coming as a solid group or how this deployment's going to -- going to go. Can you respond to her questions?

MR. HARRISON: Actually, I would prefer not to engage with the congresswoman in a public forum like this. Clearly, that is her -- those are her positions. I can tell you that the plan that was agreed to by DHS and DOD called for the incremental deployment of forces, and that's what's happening in all four states. Q Well, what does that mean for -- again, specifically for Arizona? I mean, does this mean that we're going to have 524 troops dispersed over a four-month period?

MR. HARRISON: Essentially, what it means for each state -- and again, I understand you're asking me about Arizona, but each state actually is providing their own forces to the numbers for those states. Arizona will provide 524 for Arizona. Those people are being identified, they're being trained, and they will move to support the mission that they've been asked to do by CBP and ICE as that process continues.

Q So we won't actually have 524 soldiers on the ground at one time, as we were led to believe, perhaps not by yourself, but by -- just mainstream media in general.

MR. HARRISON: You know, I'm trying to understand really what you're asking me. So let me ask you a question. When you say 524 soldiers on the ground, is the image that comes up when you say that that they're lined up along the border, 524 strong, elbow-to-elbow, or do you mean to say you're asking me whether 524 will support the mission as requested by CBP?

Q Whether or not there's going to be 524 at once, regardless of whether -- of what their duties are going to be at the time.

MR. HARRISON: Yes. I do believe that Arizona will identify its compliment of National Guard forces, and those forces will be on duty to conduct the mission they've been asked to do.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Michel (sp) and thank you, sir. I'm going to get to the other bloggers and online journalists on the call, just to be polite to their -- and respect their time.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

LT. CRAGG: Monica, please go ahead.

Q Hi, Monica Tucker from Army Wife Magazine.

We're located here in El Paso, Texas, so I guess some of the families' questions have to do with will those troops come here, and the approximate time frame because of the escalated violence in the area.

MR. HARRISON: Right. Monica, that kind of gets after specific locations, and I -- and I'm not the right person to talk to that, because again, DHS is in the lead. This is their request. We're supporting DHS, and they might better be able to answer a question like that.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: I'm not evading the question, I'm trying --

Q Oh no, I understand.

MR. HARRISON: -- trying to stay in my lane here.

Q I understand. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you -- thank you, sir. Thank you, Monica.

Dale, you were next. Please go ahead.

Q Good morning, sir. This is Dale Kissinger from MilitaryAvenue.com. My question refers to the Guard mix, whether that's

Army, Air Force, MOS, AFSC. And are they all staying in their home state or are you getting National Guard from other folks in other states coming in to the four border states?

MR. HARRISON: Okay, the last question first. Each state will provide its complement of National Guardsmen, so they're coming from within Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. As to AFSCs and MOSs, I don't have a list of those, but rest assured that it will be an Army Guard and Air Guard mix of soldiers and airmen who will support this mission.

Q Will they be mostly intel-type people, or security forces, police, MPs?

MR. HARRISON: There will be a mix of those MOSs and AFSCs and perhaps others. I wouldn't characterize mostly one or another. Q Okay, thank you, sir, very much.

MR. HARRISON: You're very welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale.

Sandra -- Sandra Erwin, you are next. Please go ahead.

Q Thank you. Sandra Erwin with National Defense. I wanted to ask you about the sort of the history of the supporting the border. You said the Guard has been doing this for 20 years. Can you talk a little bit about what the size of previous deployments have been versus this current deployment, sort of on average? Is this the largest one ever, or has there been, you know, larger ones in the past?

MR. HARRISON: Sure. As I said at the top, the National Guard has had nearly two decades of association with CBP at the Southwest border in the form of our counternarcotics program. Currently -- and this has been lost during this last couple of weeks of news on this particular mission -- but currently we have more than 300 National Guardsmen supporting the counternarcotics program down there. And that's been going on at different levels for nearly 20 years.

More recently, a deployment to the Southwest border which had the name Operation Jumpstart began in the summer of 2006, which brought on at the height of that support 6,000 Guardsmen and lasted for two years. So this is not new, this support to the Southwest border and this support to CBP. This deployment involves up to 1,200 National Guardsmen for up to 365 days or one year and is scaled based on what DHS requested of DOD, and is essentially to allow the hiring and training of approximately 1,000 more agents. That is part of a larger plan at DHS for the Southwest border that I won't get into because it's not my lane, but I know that they want to talk about this larger plan with respect to this. This Guard deployment is only part of a bigger plan that DHS has.

Q So, I'm sorry, just to clarify -- the 1,200 are sort of filling in until DHS can train up their own people, is that correct?

MR. HARRISON: "Filling in" would not be the term I would use.

I would use the word augmenting existing capability that CBP and ICE have, and for up to one year, and DHS has this larger plan through which part of it to hire 1,000 more agents over the next year.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and thank you, Sandra.

Master Sergeant Smith, did you have any questions?

Q No questions, ma'am.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, thanks. I just wanted to check.

Okay, we're going to go around the virtual room again. So Edwin, you called in first, so please go ahead with any follow-on question.

Q Yes. Will the 1,200 Guards be interdicting drugs and undocumented immigrants? What exactly will they be doing along the Southwest border?

MR. HARRISON: The two mission sets are criminal analysts and entry identification teams. And I can tell you that Guardsmen will not be doing direct law enforcement on the Southwest border.

Q And can you elaborate a little more on the incremental deployment of forces, when each state is going to get whatever amount it is that they're getting -- whatever amount of Guards?

MR. HARRISON: I know that that is a very -- a very important question. However, I think something that also has been lost in telling this story is that each state retains control of their Guardsmen under the command and control of the governor and the adjutant general of that particular state. So I would be very hesitant to get in front of the state as to its plans on timing in a very specific way. But what I can tell you is that during the next 60 to 90 days, we anticipate that those states will get these people on the mission and they'll be doing the support that DHS has requested of them.

Q Okay, thank you, sir. LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Edwin. Thank you, sir.

Michel (sp), you were next, please go ahead.

Q Yeah. A Lieutenant Valentine Castillo had told the Arizona Republic that -- well, his quote was, "we don't know yet when the troops will actually arrive." And again, this was in -- with respect to Arizona.

Has that been resolved, or is there a plan? Because from his quote in here and not knowing, it seems like there wasn't a solid date for when the troops will arrive at the border.

MR. HARRISON: Right. I don't want to address the lieutenant's quote, but I think I can talk to what you're asking me in general.

Q Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Again, the deployment has always been categorized at the planning level, at the highest levels in DHS and DOD and the National Guard Bureau, as an incremental deployment. In other words, we wouldn't just drop 1,200 people down. And the reason for that is because training and vetting is a process that has to be gone through in order to get everyone up on this mission. And you can't train everybody all at one time, so therefore, the plan called for this incremental deployment.

Now, with respect to a specific date when any given state may or may not have its complement of Guardsmen and Guardswomen on this mission, I can only tell you that that is driven by the processes of training and vetting. There is -- there -- I beg your pardon. There are some requirements that have to be met that are levied by CBP, and frankly, they involve, you know, training on equipment that needs to be done so that these people are familiar with the kinds of equipment that they're going to be using down there, and the tactics, techniques and procedures that they would have to be following.

So you want to make sure that you have fully trained people doing the mission that they're called in to do. Otherwise, we would not have what we would want at the border. So this training period was built into the process. Indeed, DOD's vision of the training period was for up to 90 days in order to get all of that done. So I think we're on track for that. I believe that we are progressing exactly as the plan was written. We are following the plan as it's prescribed. And I think that's what I want to say about that.

Q Thank you very much, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Michel (sp).

Monica Tucker, please go ahead.

Q Hi. I have no further questions right now.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Monica.

Dale Kissinger, please go ahead.

Q Yes sir, Dale Kissinger at Military Avenue. Are the folks going to be in a Title 10 or Title 32 status? And the Customs and Border Patrol (sic\Customs and Border Protection) is doing their training. Is that correct?

MR. HARRISON: The status is Title 32, under the control of the governors and the adjutants general of the state. And your second question?

Q Who's doing the training? If it's a state program, is the federal government doing the training?

MR. HARRISON: The training is being done within the state. There is some -- probably some National Guard-specific training that needs to be done, and there is CBP training that needs to be done.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HARRISON: You're very welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale.

Sandra Erwin, please go ahead.

Q Thank you. Just to get a little bit of context of the Guard's engagement right now, do you have a sense of what percentage of the Guard right now is deployed in overseas wars and what percentage is deployed in domestic duties such as the border?

MR. HARRISON: Sure. I don't have percentages, but perhaps I can help you in round approximations. Will that work for you?

Q Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah. MR. HARRISON: Numerically speaking. Okay, so we have about 60,000 people who are in some phase of federal deployment around the world, whether that be in the Balkans, in the Sinai, the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq -- so that's to the tune of about 60,000 Army and Air Guard.

Domestically, I really -- you know what, I don't know. But I can -- while we're on the phone, I can get an answer about what the domestic number is.

Q Okay.

MR. HARRISON: And I'll hopefully have that in the next five or 10 minutes.

Q Great, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and thank you, Sandra.

MR. HARRISON: Hey, can I just make another point about this? I'm sorry.

LT. CRAGG: Go ahead.

MR. HARRISON: I'm slow to (need ?) here. I just want to finish that thought at least with the understanding that, numerically speaking, the National Guard, when you combine the Army Guard and the Air Guard,

the National Guard is some 460,000 men and women -- citizen-soldiers and airmen. And if you look at that number and you subtract those who are federally involved in the overseas mission, and you subtract those who are involved in the homeland right now here domestically, you still have within the National Guard some 390-or-so- thousand citizen-soldiers and airmen here in this country able to do what their governors and/or the president needs them to do.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, and thank you, Sandra.

Just to doublecheck, Master Sergeant Smith?

Q I'm all set, ma'am. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, good. I just want to make sure.

Let's go around the room one more time before we wrap up today. So Edwin, any follow-on questions?

Q Yes. Could you also get the number for how many National Guard troops are currently on the Southwest border?

MR. HARRISON: You mean for this new mission? Q No, just -- you said that the National Guard has been working with Homeland Security for over 20 years.

MR. HARRISON: Right.

Q How many National Guards are currently there right now?

MR. HARRISON: Okay, so I -- I'll give you two answers, Edwin, because when this mission started, we had between 300 (thousand) and 350 (thousand) already there in that counterdrug mission. And since this particular deployment started, we've brought on nearly 370 (thousand) across all four states.

Q Okay. Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Edwin.

Michel (sp), please go ahead.

Q I'm good. Thank you very much for your time, and have a great morning.

MR. HARRISON: Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. And Michel (sp), just so you know -- I don't know if you're going to sign off yet, there will be an official transcript from Federal News. I'll make sure to send it to you. It'll also be loaded -- uploaded to DoDLive. I just wanted to make sure you knew that, okay?



Q Appreciate it. Thank you so much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you. Monica Tucker, I just wanted to make sure -- any follow-on questions?

Q My question was answered.

LT. CRAGG: Great. Thank you, Monica.

Dale Kissinger.

Q Yes sir. Why do you think this has been so controversial?

MR. HARRISON: Well -- I'm not playing coy here. Define this.

Q Sure. The fact that the 1,200 weren't there on the border on the 1st of August, and their plan to deploy them incremental.

MR. HARRISON: I think it was an unintended consequence of the press release that came out on July 19, actually, which was clear, saying that the deployment would begin on August 1. However, that led some, if not many, to believe that 1,200 people would be on the border on August 1st. And I can understand how that's possible.

Without being an English major, I don't know if I'm going to say this right, but we didn't see the -- we didn't see the words deployment begins August 1st as anything other than a start to the action of deploying people to the mission, and others saw it as the actual 1,200 people start that day. And that's -- it's as simple as that.

I don't think that there's anything nefarious about how this became somewhat controversial, I just think that there was a reading of that press release that drove, actually, the Arizona Republic story. And once that started, many people sort of followed up behind that story with the same conclusion -- that the Guard missed some kind of deadline, that we weren't following the plan as it was written, et cetera.

And I must say, too, we at the National Guard Bureau made many, many efforts at trying to set the record straight, but I also understand clearly how this unintended consequence of this line in the press release of July 19th could take off like it did.

But I do want to say categorically no deadline has been missed. We are following the plan as it was agreed to be DHS and DoD, and the Guard is not missing any deadline whatsoever.

Q Thank you. That's key. Appreciate it.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

I think I have the number.

LT. CRAGG: Oh, great.

MR. HARRISON: Domestically, we have almost -- well, if we have -- about 6,700 people domestically.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

MR. HARRISON: And let me -- is this the federal -- this yellow number?

MR. : Yeah.

MR. HARRISON: Okay. So I think I said approximately 60,000. I'd rather --

LT. CRAGG: Yeah.

MR. HARRISON: -- say approximately 55,000 --

LT. CRAGG: Fifty-five (thousand).

MR. HARRISON: -- for the overseas mission.

Q And the 6,700, does that include the 1,200 for the border, or is this in addition?

MR. HARRISON: It includes that number.

Q Okay. Can I ask you really quickly -- General McKinley just put out a report on the value of the Guard. And I was just wondering is this something that you do regularly, or is this an unusual instance of General McKinley issuing a report like this?

MR. HARRISON: I think it's the first white paper that General McKinley has issued. Q Okay.

MR. HARRISON: I would be happy to talk with you about that, if you want.

Q Okay. I guess we should do that on a separate call.

MR. HARRISON: 703 --

Q Okay.

MR. HARRISON: -- 607 --

Q Mm hmm.

MR. HARRISON: 2586.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: And you were --

Q I'm Sandra Erwin with National Defense Magazine.

MR. HARRISON: Okay, Sandra.

Q Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

LT. CRAGG: And thank you -- previous to that, thank you Dale. And then thank you, Sandra.

Well, we've gone around the horn three three times, so I think we've got everyone's questions. So at this time, I'm going to turn it back over to Mr. Harrison. Sir, if you'd like to end with any closing thoughts, then we'll wrap up today's roundtable.

The floor is again yours.

MR. HARRISON: Thank you very much.

Folks, I very much appreciate my first excursion into a Bloggers Roundtable. You were very, very clear with your questions. You allowed me the opportunity to clear up my answers, as convoluted as they can sometimes be.

I just want to leave you with the sense that -- a couple of things. One, the National Guard is pleased to be doing this mission in support of DHS and, subsequent to DHS, CBP and ICE. We're uniquely suited to do this mission. We are implementing the plan agreed to by DHS and DoD, and everything is moving according to plan.

The original intent, and the -- what we're doing today is an incremental deployment allowing our soldiers and airmen to be properly trained and vetted and brought onto the mission. And that's happening the way it should be by the design. And I definitely appreciate your time today.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

And just to remind everybody, you've been listening to Mr. Jack Harrison, who's the National Guard Bureau director of communications. And I will send the Federal News transcript when it's completed later today to everyone who was on the call. We'll also load it to [www.dodlive.mil](http://www.dodlive.mil), and we'll also have an audio file from today's discussion as well.

Thank you again, sir, for taking your time to speak to the group today. And thank you for everyone who called in. This ends today's discussion. Feel free to end the call at any time.

Thank you again, sir.

MR. HARRISON: Thank you. Bye-bye.

END.

